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Edited by
Michael Collyer
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Foreword

The title of this book may suggest to some readers that there is a peculiar type of countries that we can call ‘emigrant nations’. This concept seems to be the mirror image of “immigrant nations”, a description which is frequently used for the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and occasionally also for Latin American states or Israel. The common denominator for these nations is that they were created by colonial settlers or diasporic populations who established their distinct nation-building projects against both metropolitan powers and indigenous populations.

This observation suggests that the two concepts can hardly be symmetrical. Nation-states need territorial populations; therefore there is no ‘emigrant nation’ in the sense of a nation-state being constituted by emigration from a territory rather than by immigration into it. Of course, the immigrants that established ‘immigrant nations’ were at the same time emigrants. However, the distinctive characteristics of the immigrant nations listed above is that they have, sometimes over long historical periods, overcome the association between nationhood and immigrant origins, through establishing themselves as sovereign states as well through increasing diversity of the origins of their immigrant citizens. They have come to define themselves as immigrant destinations, rather than through immigrant origin.

The distinction between immigrant and emigrant nation-states is still a heuristically useful one, if we focus on how continuous and large-scale immigration and emigration have become historically important for the self-perception of nation-states rather than on how nations have been founded. In this broader sense, we can certainly think of nineteenth-century France as an immigrant nation and Italy as an emigrant one.

While such a dichotomy makes sense when analysing historical narratives and imaginaries of nationhood, it quickly breaks down once we examine migration flows and state responses to them over a longer period. As the editor of this volume points out in his conclusions: ‘[T]he institutional challenges of engaging with emigrants [have] to be [considered] common to all nation-states, irrespective of location, size, wealth, political system, emigration history or post-colonial context.’
Indeed, if we imagine counterfactually what it would mean for a state to be a non-emigrant nation in the broadest sense of the term, then we will not find a single exemplar of this species. Every state claims to represent and protect its nationals abroad vis-à-vis their country of residence. And no state fully disconnects from its emigrants by depriving them automatically of their citizenship. To be sure, authoritarian regimes often denationalize dissidents whom they force into exile. And a number of democratic ones withdraw their citizenship from emigrants who have settled for many years abroad and have acquired another state’s citizenship. However, as these exceptions illustrate, emigration itself is never a sufficient condition for losing citizenship.

Even more telling is the fact that all states allow emigrants who have retained their citizenship of origin to pass this status on to second generations born abroad. There are major differences between states with regard to the conditions under which those born abroad can retain a parental citizenship of origin and bequeath it in turn to third and later generations. However, even prototypical immigrant nations with unconditional jus soli, such as the United States and Canada, turn the children of their emigrants into citizens, although they impose conditions for retaining this status beyond the age of majority.

Finally, the right of emigrant citizens to return to the state whose nationals they are is enshrined in international law and all states recognize a duty to readmit their own citizens. There is no equivalent right to non-citizens to immigration or naturalization. We can thus conclude that all states are constructed as emigrant nations, whereas not all are immigrant nations in the broad sense of keeping the state open at least to some extent for the admission of non-citizens to their territory and citizenship. The legal link between states and emigrant citizens is part of the basic architecture of the international state system. And the institution of birthright citizenship provides the crucial mechanism that sustains this link over time and across borders.

This is the second core argument running through the book that Michael Collyer emphasizes in his conclusions. ‘[E]migration ... highlights the limits and the evolution of the spatiality of the nation-state system much more effectively than immigration.’ The nation in the legal sense comprises all nationals and thus stretches beyond the state territory through including emigrants. The relations of rights and duties between states, their external citizens and the states where they reside have evolved over time and the general trend seems to be a strengthening rather than weakening of this extra-territoriality dimension of statehood.
We should be cautious not to confuse extra-territoriality with de-territorialization. Emigrant nations are not about a general weakening of state powers through processes of economic globalization. They are also not about enhanced global mobility of persons that escapes the capacity of states to control their borders. Emigrant nationhood is a relation between states and extra-territorial populations that tends to expand rather than shrink the powers of states.

If no state is an emigrant nation in the foundational sense and all states are emigrant nations in the persistent link sense, then all that is interesting to study empirically must fall somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum of conceptual interpretation. This is precisely what the present book is about. It examines the means states employ for engaging with their emigrants, the extent to which they are committed to doing so and the ways in which emigration enters official narratives about the nation.

The third argument highlighted by Michael Collyer as a common finding in the contributions to this book goes some way towards explaining the variety of state engagements with emigrants: ‘[A] narrative inclusion of emigrants in stories of “the people” is a necessary pre-condition for institutional developments associated with emigrant engagement.’ This does not suggest that we need to fall back on explaining state policies towards emigrants or immigrants through types of civic or ethnic nationhood or other national models of citizenship. Such explanations have been rightly criticized for ignoring the inevitable mix of ethnic and civic principles in all constructions of nationhood, the sometimes radical policy changes that upset expectations about path-dependent national models and the multiple purposes that states pursue in their engagements with both emigrants and immigrants. Instead of considering narratives of nationhood as a stable “independent variable” that explains policy output, we need to understand them as discourses through which states gain legitimacy for policies that may be driven by quite different motives. Such motives include expected economic benefits from remittances, foreign policy relations with emigrants’ host states as well as political support among domestic constituencies that are ideologically committed to ethnic nationhood or socially linked to emigrant communities. A public narrative about the contribution of emigrants in building or sustaining the nation is therefore a necessary condition rather than an independent cause for policies of emigrant inclusion.

Conceptual clarification of emigrant nationhood and interpretive understanding of the empirical variety of public policies of emigrant
engagement are also necessary for addressing the democratic challenges. The present book does not aim at evaluating what states do or prescribing what they ought to do from a democratic or liberal perspective. There is a vast literature in political theory on how liberal democracies ought to engage with immigrants, but states’ relations with emigrants have until recently been ignored by normative theorists. This is surprising, since the few contributions that have been written on the topic over the last decade indicate pervasive disagreement among scholars who otherwise seem to defend quite similar positions on immigration control or immigrant integration.

Normative questions about emigration can be roughly divided into three groups. The first one is about the balance between individual liberty and collective benefits and burdens in the relation between states and emigrant citizens. Should states have a right to restrict their citizens’ freedom of exit when mass emigration threatens the welfare of the resident population, for example, when health services break down because a majority of medical doctors and nurses seek employment abroad? Do emigration states that have invested into developing the human capital of their citizens through public education have a claim to tax the income of emigrants?

A second set of questions concerns democratic principles for citizenship inclusion. Should only those be included in the demos who are subjected to the laws as residents in the territory? Should emigrants have a right to retain their citizenship of origin even when they naturalize abroad? Should citizenship be transmitted by descent to those born abroad? And should citizens born abroad or residing permanently there have voting rights and be thus represented in legislative decisions in their countries of origin?

A third set of questions concerns relations between migrant source and destination states. What kind of personal jurisdiction can states exercise over their emigrant citizens living in the territory of other states? Should income earned abroad be taxed by states or residence or citizenship? Should dual citizens have cumulative rights and duties in two independent states?

The point of raising these questions here is to show that they do not have obvious answers which could be derived from generally recognized principles of liberal democracy. The reason for this normative uncertainty is that answers depend on prior questions about the boundaries of political community. Through their engagements with citizens who have left the territory, emigrant nations have significantly expanded these boundaries. But nationalism is an ideology that promotes the
interests and moral priority of a particular political community. It is notoriously incapable of providing generalizable principles that could be acceptable to members and non-members alike. What political theorists should then learn from the historical and comparative studies of emigrant nations assembled in this book is that democracies need boundaries but that these boundaries must not be accepted as given by either the territorial borders of sovereign states or by their self-defined claims to extra-territorial nationhood. The politics and policies of emigrant nations need to be critically scrutinized. For this, political theorists need books like the present one that help them understand the general evolution and persistent variety of emigrant nations. And then they still need to do their own job and propose coherent conceptions of democratic boundaries.

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